

Northwestern Study Abroad Application Review Rubric

Northwestern programs and exchanges can receive a high volume of applications for a limited number of spaces, making admission competitive. If a program receives more applications than the spaces available, students will be waitlisted.

The application review process is thorough and takes the complete application into consideration. Students are selected based on how closely their background and goals fit with the program. Below is a list of selection criteria that factor into the admission process for Northwestern programs and exchanges, along with descriptions of what is considered high (4) and low (1) levels of alignment with requirements and expectations. Note: Not all criteria are given equal weight.

Quality of Application

Application is complete, submitted on time, shows attention to detail, and is well-written.

Pertains to: Full Application

Level 4	Level 3	Level 2	Level 1
Responses are comprehensive and reflect close attention to program details	Responses are complete and reflect some attention to program details	Responses are incomplete or lack program details	Responses are incomplete and lack program details
Responses reflect strong attention to grammar and writing skills	Responses reflect some attention to grammar and writing skills	Responses reflect little attention to grammar and writing skill	Responses reflect poor attention to grammar and writing skills
		Application components are missing or late	Application components are missing or late

Motivation & Seriousness

Your application must demonstrate a seriousness of purpose and clear reasons for choosing your program. In your application, you are able to articulate goals that are realistic, achievable, and relevant to the content and context of the program. It is important that you demonstrate why you actually want to participate in the program and avoid generalities (i.e., study abroad is a requirement, was recommended to you, or is something you have always wanted to do).

Pertains to: Personal Statements

Level 4	Level 3	Level 2	Level 1
Has clear goals that are very well-defined	Has somewhat clear goals that are somewhat defined	Goals are described but not clearly defined	Has no clear goals; Cannot articulate why program was chosen
Goals are closely related to the program	Goals are somewhat related to the program	Goals are peripheral to the program	Goals are not achievable through program

Program Fit

It is essential that you do your research on your program of choice prior to applying to ensure that there is good alignment between your background and goals and the program offerings. Your application must demonstrate a thorough and critical understanding of the program, region, and expected outcomes. In your application, you should provide specific examples of opportunities available through your program and why those are important or interesting to you.

Pertains to: Personal Statements, Preliminary Course Plan, Interview (if applicable)

Level 4	Level 3	Level 2	Level 1
Program information is very well-defined with specific examples	Program information is somewhat defined with examples	Program information is described, but not clearly defined or somewhat inaccurate	Program information is lacking or inaccurate
Opportunities to engage with the host institution, community, and/or other program-specific elements are identified and described in detail	Opportunities to engage with the host institution, community, and/or other program-specific elements are identified and described with moderate detail	Opportunities to engage with the host institution, community, and/or other program-specific elements are identified but vague and lacking detail	Student has no articulated plans for engagement with the host institution, community, or program abroad
Demonstrates a deep connection between program features and future academic, professional, and personal goals	Demonstrates a connection between program features and future academic, professional, and personal goals	Demonstrates a surface-level connection between program features and future academic, professional, and personal goals	Demonstrates little to no connection between program features and academic, professional, and personal goals

Academic Fit

Your application must demonstrate a clear understanding of the courses that are offered on the program and how courses/experiences apply to your degree plan and academic, linguistic, and/or cultural goals. You must also clearly articulate how the program theme (Northwestern programs) or direct enrollment in courses at a foreign university (exchanges) relates to your academic interests.

Pertains to: Personal Statements, Degree Plan (Major, Minor), Preliminary Course Plan, Transcript (Related Courses)

Level 4	Level 3	Level 2	Level 1
Demonstrates a deep connection between program theme / direct enrollment and academic interests	Demonstrates a connection between program theme / direct enrollment and academic interests	Demonstrates a surface-level connection between program theme / direct enrollment and academic interests	Demonstrates little to no connection between program theme / direct enrollment and academic interests
Has taken multiple on-campus classes that relate to program classes	Has taken 1-2 on-campus classes that relate to program classes or articulates clearly why the program meets academic interests not explored on campus	Has taken at least 1 on-campus class that relates to program classes or loosely describes why the program meets academic interests not explored on campus	Has taken no on-campus classes that relate to program classes and does not indicate why the program meets academic interests not explored on campus

Academic Readiness & Achievement

Northwestern requires that students have a cumulative GPA of 2.0 or above to be eligible for Northwestern programs. Students with a cumulative GPA of 2.0-2.5 will be required to provide additional documentation regarding their academic performance as it relates to their readiness for study abroad. Although cumulative GPA is reviewed, Northwestern looks more carefully at grades earned in those subjects that are offered on the Northwestern program, or “related courses.”

Pertains to: Transcript (Grades in Related Courses)

Level 4	Level 3	Level 2	Level 1
Mostly A grades (3.7-4.0 GPA) in related courses	A and B grades (3.3-3.7 GPA) in related courses	Mostly B grades (2.7-3.3 GPA) in related courses	A, B, and C grades (2.0-2.7 GPA) in related courses

Class Standing

Priority is typically given to students who are later in their degree progress. Class standing refers to progress toward degree, not number of years or terms at Northwestern.

Pertains to: Graduation Year

Level 4	Level 3	Level 2	Level 1
Fourth Year Student (Senior)	Third Year Student (Junior)	Second Year Student (Sophomore)	First Year Student

Maturity & Responsibility

Your application must demonstrate emotional stability and maturity. Life abroad demands patience, flexibility, good humor, good will, and an ability to tolerate uncertainty. It is important that you exhibit a high degree of responsibility and self-direction, and demonstrate that you are able to lead a stable, responsible, and healthy life abroad as a representative of Northwestern and your home country.

Pertains to: Personal Statements, School Approval, Interview (if applicable)

Program Cohort

For Northwestern programs, you must demonstrate your commitment to the Northwestern cohort experience.

Pertains to: Personal Statements, Interview (if applicable)

Program Commitment

Priority is typically given to students who list the program as their First Choice program.

Pertains to: First Choice, Second Choice